

Gone Today, Hair Tomorrow

GUEST COLUMN

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I'm having withdrawal symptoms. Celebrity withdrawal. People have stopped recognizing me in the street! So, sorry folks, I had to come up with a lame excuse to write about hair, just so that I could change my photo.

So, in this season of being thankful, I'm thanking my hair for growing back to a style I'm happy with. It's taken 16 months to go from zero to as seen here in my new photo. What's the big deal you say? Shouldn't you be more thankful for being in remission, for still being here, for the golden sunsets, or for the wonderful people around you? Of course, I'm thankful for all those things and more. But hair is totally underrated.

The truth is, hair really does matter. Yes, getting treatment and getting into remission is more important, but let's not pretend that hair has no value. Don't try to make those with cancer feel better by telling them it's not important that they've lost their hair. If you ever do it to me, I'll have no choice but, pardon the pun, to hairass you!

You see, when you lose your hair due to treatment, the first thing everyone says is "well it's no big deal, you're still beautiful." Trouble is, only people who haven't lost their hair say that. Again, it's one of those lame remarks on the list of what not to say to cancer patients. Don't understand? I'm not surprised.

Put it this way. Go shave your head and eyebrows. Don't want to? Protesting a little are we? Then don't tell someone it doesn't matter that they've lost theirs.

You see, for a start, everyone knows you're ill. Wear a wig to hide hair loss and you can get away with it. Lose your eyebrows too, and you get those sad pathetic looks. "Ahh, poor dear, she's got cancer, how tragic" Suddenly you're a person with cancer, rather than just a person. There's no hiding it. It may sound trivial when you've not experienced it, but for many it's important enough that it directs the choice of treatment.

But here's the thing. Hair defines who you are. It's not an accessory you change at whim. You don't get up and think I'll be a long haired blond today. It takes weeks, months to find your 'style' and then most people keep it for years. It makes you who

you are, how confident you feel, whether you sit quietly listening, or are the center of attention. It changes how you interact with people, and how they interact with you. Think about it. Imagine going into a crowded room with a bald head and no eyebrows. Feel like you'd rather shrink into the wallpaper? Wondering if anyone is fooled by the zigzag lines you've drawn above your eyes? Wishing you'd warn that bright pink head scarf a well meaning friend got you? Thought so.

So this Thanksgiving, be thankful for everything that is good in life. Be thankful for your health, your family, your friends and more. But when you look in that mirror, and see the real you, also thank your hair and eyebrows for sticking with you.

Kay Kerbyson is Secretary of the Los Alamos Council on Cancer, and Founder/President of Ovarian Cancer Together Inc., the only non-profit specifically supporting women in New Mexico with ovarian cancer. Resources, support and education materials, for those effected by cancer, can be found at www.losalamoscounciloncancer.org and www.ovariancancertogether.org